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STAT

INSIDE THE PENTAGON  
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WASHINGTON

The heart of the Pentagon, contrary to popular movies, is not buried in a cavern deep beneath the massive building and the only crucial red telephone is the line to the White House.

The National Military Command Center -- where U.S. military command, control and communications operations are coordinated worldwide -- is located on the second floor of the Pentagon complex.

The 'hot line' communication link between Washington and Moscow are by land and undersea cables and replicated by 'up links' to U.S. and Soviet space satellites. An American fluent in Russian and an operator are always present.

The Soviets have similar teams on their side of the circuit, established in 1963 after the Cuban missile crisis.

During a guided tour of the top secret installation last week, a United Press International reporter witnessed the Pentagon sending innocuous, English language test messages. One of them began, 'The humble pistachio is the common name for a nut...' Moscow was sending some similarly inane observation in Russian.

At stated periods both sides acknowledge they are receiving during the test and then return to repeating the same junk traffic.

To avoid misunderstandings, conversations on this critical link for crises -- conducted in both Russian and English -- are carefully transmitted by 60-word-per-minute teletypes and, in coming months, will be supplemented by high speed computers capable of transmitting charts and maps.

Unlike what has been portrayed in many movies, there is no red button that could set off a nuclear Armageddon and no red telephone attached to the 'hot line' with Moscow.

If a 'real' message does come in from Moscow, there is a red telephone to alert the White House.

The command center is indeed impressive. Special credentials are required to enter and no cameras, recorders or beepers are permitted inside.

The center, a \$15.4 million, 77,000 square feet facility, was opened Feb. 13, 1976, to supplement or replace earlier complexes dating back to 1962.

The facility is designed to provide instant communications between U.S. military forces around the globe and the president, defense secretary and Joint Chiefs of Staff.

And, if necessary, to give the 'go' message to launch land and sea-based nuclear missiles and strategic bombers.

Clocks around the walls give various times -- Moscow, Tokyo, Honolulu, Greenwich Mean Time and others.

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